

III. Increased Public Education and Operation Lifesaver

Since 1973, more than \$2.8 billion of Federal-aid funds has been spent by states for safety improvements at highway-rail crossings. Over half of this was for automated warning devices. However, half of all collisions occur at crossings so equipped. To realize full benefit from the public investment in these devices, motorists must be educated in their responsibilities at all types of crossings.

Operation Lifesaver (OL) is an active, continuing public information and education program to help prevent and reduce crashes, injuries and fatalities and improve driver performance at our Nation's 280,000 public and private highway-rail crossings. Operation Lifesaver, Inc. (OLI) is a tax exempt, non-profit corporation which coordinates and facilitates state and local OL programs nationwide.

OLI needs to supplement its Federal funds with funds from other sources. This would serve the dual purpose of providing additional funds in the near term for the promotion of the OL message and would establish a cushion should Federal funding be reduced or eliminated in the future.

The success and effectiveness of OL state programs at getting the OL message out is directly dependent on the capabilities of the OL State Coordinator. In some cases this individual is a state employee, sometimes a railroad, railroad association or railroad supply industry employee (ranging from executive to locomotive engineer), sometimes a local or state police officer or official and sometimes an employee of a safety or highway oriented group (e.g., American Automobile Association, a state safety council, a school bus driver, etc.). Many carry out the function of State Coordinator as an "additional duty." Many are volunteers, receiving no remuneration for their effort, and little support. Many of the State Coordinators need assistance, i.e., considerable additional man-hours. The credibility of the program suffers when the public reaches only a message machine at the State Coordinator's office. Scheduling, coordination, support and material functions must often wait until the weekend or until the State Coordinator returns. If an assistant were available, their involvement would expand the presence, visibility and outreach of the program in communities throughout the U.S.

The Department proposes to work with Operation Lifesaver, states and industry advocates to facilitate delivery of the OL message at the state and local levels and thus to increase public awareness of hazards at crossings and of motorist responsibilities.

A. Marketing Materials Plan

NHTSA, FHWA, FTA, FRA and possibly OLI will work together in periodic meetings to develop programs and material to promote public and youth awareness. A marketing materials plan will be developed. When products are available, NHTSA Regional staff will promote this material through Governors' Representatives to appropriate organizations and officials. States may use Section 402 funds to purchase or reproduce materials as well as to implement programs.

B. Driver Training Materials

NHTSA, working with the AAMVA, will review current driver training material relevant to highway-rail crossing safety and will determine what material(s) may need updating and where gaps exist. NHTSA, FHWA, FTA, FRA and possibly OLI, will work together to select the best of these materials, develop new and updated materials, if necessary, and disseminate this information to the states. An interagency working group will be established. Draft materials will be completed by Winter, and final products will be available by Summer 1995.

C. National and Community Service

For FY 96, pursuant to the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, FRA will explore the possibility of assigning national service participants to support OL State Coordinators.

D. Truck and Bus Involved Accidents

In the near-term the FHWA will take the following actions to improve highway-rail crossing programs with respect to commercial motor vehicles.

1. On-Guard Notice

Publish an On-Guard notice to alert the truck and bus industry of the dangers at crossings. This was mailed to all 270,000 interstate motor carriers on our records. The notice was written, printed and distributed in February 1994.

2. Advisory Bulletin

Send an advisory bulletin to the trade press about the danger of accidents at crossings. The bulletin was released to all motor carriers in February.

3. Public Service Print Advertisements

Prepare public service print advertisements for the trade journals on truck and bus accidents at highway-rail crossings. Attention will be given to ensuring the articles reach state and local trucking association newsletters. The public service messages will be published and distributed to 4,500 potential carriers in June.

4. "Trucker on the Train" Program

Work with Amtrak, the American Trucking Associations (ATA), OLI and FRA to create a "Trucker on the Train" program where motor carrier executives and drivers accompany train engineers on the engine of a train to view first hand dangerous highway-rail crossings. FHWA and FRA representatives have recently begun meeting with the ATA and Amtrak officials on this program.

5. Operation Lifesaver

Encourage OLI staff to meet with trucking companies and associations regarding this problem. An OL spokesperson addressed the ATA Safety Management Council in February. The ATA Safety Management Council reminded their members and drivers in a January letter of crossing dangers.

6. National Safety Organizations

Address the issue at meetings of national safety organizations such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). Discuss the issue with industry executives at the next National Motor Carrier Advisory Committee meeting.

7. On-Site Compliance Reviews

Ensure that at each on-site compliance review conducted by the Office of Motor Carriers field staff and state personnel, the motor carrier is informed of the risks at highway-rail crossings.

E. Operation Lifesaver Matching Funds

Legislation will be proposed to increase the FHWA grant to OLI to an amount not to exceed \$500,000 annually, but any portion of the funding in excess of the current grant of \$300,000 (and \$100,000 from FRA) would be available to OL only if OLI matches the increased amount through its own fund raising mechanisms outside of the public sector. The entire amount of the FHWA funding would come from a draw-down of the STP funds set aside for highway-rail crossing safety.

Failure to secure additional funding for OL will hamper the organization's ability to expand its activities to adequately support the Federal effort in this area.